

Trump's Nuclear Policies

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Over the next few weeks ICSA will be looking at the impact of the election of Donald Trump on nuclear issues in the USA and around the world. The first in this series takes an overview to consider which areas are up for discussion.



What are Trump's Policies?

As we consider policies of the Trump administration we have very little to go on. James Acton has described the new industry of reading policies on the basis of appointees, rumors and what was said on the campaign trail as a [new form of Kremlinology](#). Particularly when looking at nuclear policy at the moment we are unsure. We are unsure not, perhaps, because Trump does not wish yet to announce the policies, but because he and his team are unsure themselves as to what they are. Within the first few days of becoming President Elect doubt has been cast over reasonably well-established, if not entirely credible, campaign positions. However, we can highlight the areas where a nuclear-related policy is needed. These will be the main areas that will require decisions by the Trump administration.

The Future of the US Nuclear Arsenal

The US still has [thousands](#) of deliverable nuclear weapons, split between submarine, launched SLBMs, ground-based ICBMs and long range bombers; in what is known as the [Triad](#). This arsenal was set to undergo an expensive ([estimated to be \\$1 trillion over 30 years](#)) modernization program. Trump, and the Congress need to make a decision on this.

Beyond the status of the arsenal itself, there is how it would be used. US nuclear doctrine was thought to be under review earlier this year at the Presidential level. There was much speculation that Obama was set to announce the end of First Strike, that the US would only retaliate with its nuclear weapons if it was attacked. [Nothing came of this review in the end](#), but that does not mean the new administration would not seek a review of its own.

US Policy on Non-Proliferation

On the campaign trail, Trump seemed to [argue for proliferation in South Korea and Japan](#) (Jeffrey Lewis goes through many of his statements [here](#)). Policy in office may be very different. Limited proliferation, however, is not Donald Trump's idea and has [long](#)

been argued by thinkers in the realist school of international relations. That the benefits of the US maintaining a policy of non-proliferation may have to be publicly argued again is a worrying development. If the US supports proliferation in some countries there would have to be a new rationale, that had international acceptance, for restricting it in others.

Extended Deterrence

The US must also decide if it still thinks it is worthwhile to provide security assurances to allies, including an extended nuclear deterrent, to countries in the Middle East, East Asia and Europe. If the US begins to look shaky on its security commitments allies will start to look after their own security, and it is important to consider if this would lead to the development of nuclear weapons. They may also begin to look elsewhere for protection.

The Iran Deal

The Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action, aka the Iran Deal, was attacked by Republicans (and some Democrats) after it was announced and by Trump on the campaign trail. Is it possible to scrap the old deal and arrange another one more favorable to the US? The issue will continue to be the subject of much debate until we have a clear answer from the new administration.